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SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT PRESENTS AMBITIOUS PLAN FOR QALAT CITY

¶1. SUMMARY: Governor Delbar Jan Arman was the star of the show at an April 29 conference in Kabul organized by the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) and USAID's Capacity Development Program (CDP). Minister of Urban Development Yousuf Pashtoon and a team of seven MoUD engineers presented a strategic plan, fleshed out by seven infrastructure projects, that aims to transform Qalat City into what the Minister described as an "Afghan model for urban development." Governor Arman gave interviews to RTA, Ariana, and Tolo television journalists and appeared on the national news, expressing his backing of the plan and his appreciation for the Ministry's choice of Qalat as its pilot city for urban renewal in Afghanistan.

¶2. Minister Pashtoon led off the conference by explaining his choice of Qalat as MoUD's pilot city for urban development outside Kabul. He noted Qalat's strategic location on Highway 1 between Kabul and Kandahar, and linked urban development to both security and governance. The Minister also praised the "good governance, strong leadership, and effective PRT" in Qalat. Governor Arman and others spoke to approximately 50 representatives from Ministries, NGOs, IOs, and the press about Zabul Province's need for a center of governance and commerce which would attract NGOs and private businesses to Qalat in order to take advantage of Zabul's potential to become an agricultural powerhouse. (Zabul, though traditionally poor, has good water resources and produces top-quality agricultural produce.)

¶3. Working within an existing strategic plan, MoUD engineers presented plans for seven infrastructure projects. The projects include 25 km of road improvements, a drainage system, a sewer system, a sewage processing plant, extension of electrification to outlying neighborhoods and villages, new wells, and a clean water distribution system. Although the population of Qalat City is currently only 20,000, a strong trend toward urbanization in Zabul has expanded the city into outlying areas, which will likely promote further growth.

¶4. The presentations demonstrated that MoUD has the capacity to develop realistic project plans for urban infrastructure. Following the presentations, conference participants discussed the plans. A representative from the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) pointed out that his agency should become more involved, as IDLG will ultimately have fiscal responsibility for the municipality. He also stated that the ambitious urban development plan would require a new legal framework for land registration. Several participants questioned the capacity, or willingness, of contractors to execute the projects in Qalat using mostly unskilled

local labor. Minister Pashtoon emphasized that his Ministry did not have the capacity to execute or to fund the projects, saying that implementation depended upon the political leadership's ability to attract donors and field the required labor. Governor Arman responded by saying that he and the people of Zabul were up to the challenges ahead and would work vigorously to see the urban development of Qalat become a reality.

15. Qalat City is dusty, shabby and impoverished, but there are clear signs of economic growth, fueled by produce and animal products coming from outlying areas and constant commercial traffic along Highway 1. The price tag for the MOUD/CDP plan - over 20 million USD for the seven core infrastructure projects - will likely seem unrealistic to potential donors who are accustomed to thinking of Qalat as a provincial backwater. The challenge will be to convince potential donors that Zabul is sufficiently secure, and that there is real potential for wealth creation to make the ambitious plan cost-effective and sustainable. The Governor and PRT intend to host several Ministers from Kabul for visits to Qalat to gain their support, as well as to engage UNAMA as a "lobbyist" for the Qalat urban development plan among NGOs and IOs. If the plan to make Qalat the "model of Afghan urban development" becomes reality the GIRoA will have a tremendous success story: "If it can be done in Zabul, it can be done anywhere."

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